

Simon Tedeschi MPs in Portugal approve gay marriage

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Gay activists celebrate in front of the Portuguese Parliament after the approval of a bill to legalise same-sex marriages. Photo: AFP

Sun at 3:56am · Comment · LikeUnlike · Share6 people like this.50 of 52

Ian Shanahan Oxymoron...

Sun at 5:50am

Simon Tedeschi What is the oxymoron?

Sun at 6:49am

Ian Shanahan "Marriage" is by definition heterosexual. (I'm against the language being hijacked by special-interest groups, this one having already misappropriated the word "gay" [thank you Oscar Wilde].) If homosexuals want a formal commitment ceremony, fine, then name it something else...

Sun at 11:35am

Margaret Morgan Ian, sorry for butting in, but definitions of marriage have changed enormously over the centuries and across jurisdictions. Once, it was an entirely economic contract with little to do with romantic love, effectively the "sale" of a woman by her father to her husband. Marriage between people of different racial backgrounds was considered to be invalid. It's society which defines what marriage means, and most Australians support same-sex marriage. It isn't "hijacking" because the extension of marriage to gay and lesbian couples doesn't in any way remove that right from straight people.

Sun at 11:44am

Ian Shanahan Margaret: You claim that "most Australians support same-sex marriage". Where is the evidence for this? (Nobody asked me... Anecdotally, I'd be inclined to say the opposite, actually – with many Australians not giving a damn one way or the other.) In any case, 'argument by numbers' is a non-argument. Granted, society changes words' meanings over time – of course. This is rarely for the best since it frequently leads to self-contradictions, as with the words "prevent" or "sick". All of the older contexts of marriage had one thing in common: they (potentially, at least) led to the PRODUCTION of offspring; so-called 'gay marriage' *ipso facto* does not. I add that, like Mark, I am motivated by the desire for linguistic precision.

Sun at 12:08pm

Margaret Morgan Ian, a number of surveys have demonstrated majority support for same sex marriage in Australia. For example: <http://news.theage.com.au/breaking-news-national/sixty-per-cent-back-gay-marriage-survey-20090616-cfi5.html>

The appeal to popularity is indeed a logical fallacy, but not in this case. In this context, the argument is about a "special interest group" "hijacking" the language. If the majority of people support the idea that the term "marriage" apply to homosexuals as well as heterosexuals, then the fallacy does not apply – the language isn't being abused in their view. Contrast this with "The majority of people believe God exists, therefore, God exists" – a clear case of fallacious reasoning.

The suggestion that only marriages potentially leading to the production of offspring should rightly be deemed "marriage" is spurious. A large proportion of married people don't want children, or can't have them. For those that wish to but can't, IVF, sperm donation and adoption are options – just as they can be for gays and lesbians.

Arguments against same-sex marriage (apart from the overtly religious) tend to fall into three categories:

(1) the linguistic, which fails because in language, meaning is dependent only on usage, not prescription;

(2) the begetting of children, which as I note above is unsupported; and

(3) the curious suggest that same-sex marriage somehow undermines heterosexual marriage, for which I have not heard the remotest justification. The conferring of rights is not a zero-sum game.

I too value linguistic precision – and also, logic.

Sun at 12:43pm

Simon Tedeschi I agree, Margaret. I think, though, Lewis Black said it best:
<http://www.lewisblack.com/audio.aspx#audio>. go down to the Gay Marriage audio clip

Sun at 1:27pm

Simon Tedeschi Even better.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-id4GKsaQk>

Sun at 1:30pm

Mark Isaacs I think Margaret you clearly articulate what's in my mind anyway. I am also comfortable with proposing that the movement to support same-sex marriage is not really about challenging "discrimination" in the classic sense. I am a heterosexual and I also cannot marry someone of the same sex. The current law does not "discriminate", it simply *defines* marriage (although in a deeper sense every definition involves a "discrimination" between what falls within it and what falls outside it). We should be clear that the campaign for same-sex marriage is indeed a campaign to change the definition of marriage which does not stigmatise it inherently; if successful it would certainly not be the first time that definitions, language and legal structures have changed to reflect a majority view. I do think you overlook an additional category of argument against same-sex marriage, which is the "slippery slope" argument, that the definition of marriage can also be changed in other ways to suit interest groups, such as challenging the current definition that it involves only two people. Aside from religious support for polygamy within minority subsections of the Islamic and Mormon faiths there are also cases of secular polyandrists who might join in to mount arguments for further extensions to the definition of marriage. However, without venturing a view on the ethics of polygamy/polyandry I'd note that this line would fail currently on the majority support argument. At the same time, a conservative argument *not* to change the definition of marriage is not in itself evidence of homophobia but rather simply of conservatism and/or belief and I feel progressives campaigning for same-sex marriage should ideally avoid *ad hominem* attacks like "homophobic" on their opponents that can occur.

Sun at 1:32pm

Margaret Morgan That all makes sense to me, Mark. Accusations of "homophobia" are indeed very unhelpful.

Sun at 1:59pm

Margaret Morgan Funny guy, Simon. He shares my perplexity about how gay marriage "destroys marriages." My husband and I got married in the Netherlands, and oddly enough, their same-sex marriage laws haven't had any negative impact on ours, as far as I can see! *smiles*

Sun at 2:11pm

Ian Shanahan Hi Margaret. The link you cite reports that a majority of Australians support the *concept* of same-sex 'marriage', not that they necessarily agree with the terminology – an important distinction.

You wrote: "The suggestion that only marriages potentially leading to the production of offspring should rightly be deemed 'marriage' is spurious..." Not so; although I should have been more specific. I meant in my earlier post, more specifically, 'reproduction initiated via sexual intercourse' – i.e. through natural means. (I used the word "potential" in recognition of heterosexuals who discover that they cannot naturally conceive, should they wish.)

In any event, 'marriage' (until the mid 20th century in the West: I'm thinking of civil unions) has been a ceremony sanctioned by a religion – wherever a couple could be bothered to have a ceremony – presided over by a religious celebrant. Again, this will not be the case for same-sex unions – apart from those religious practitioners who would wilfully contravene their own sacred texts.

On these two grounds, same-sex unions differ fundamentally from marriage. Hence my desire not to 'muddy the waters' linguistically.

Anyway, for those who *really* insist upon a legal, same-sex union – I'd be curious to know what motivates their insistence: i.e. why not just live together *de facto*? – call it ... a 'nuptiality' (or whatever). Define it! That way, the ungainly adjectival construct "same-sex" can be jettisoned. To argue against such an all-encompassing linguistic and legal solution would reveal some other motivation...

Sun at 5:30pm

Mark Isaacs Ian, the horse has already bolted on non-religious marriages! Being sanctioned by a religion is really an archaism in terms of a necessary underpinning for marriage even as it currently stands. And you know full well that "sacred texts" are open to different interpretations by different denominations/factions of the major religions, and that in fact some religions have no prohibition against homosexuality, so in theory could endorse same-sex marriage. So the likely result would be that a minority of same-sex marriages would be religious, and the majority civil, as is probably the case already with heterosexual marriage in Australia anyway.

Sun at 5:31pm

Margaret Morgan I think you're splitting hairs with the distinction between supporting the concept of marriage and supporting the terminology, Ian. (Here are the survey questions and answers: <http://www.australianmarriageequality.com/Galaxy200906.pdf> . The words "marriage" and "marry" were specially used in the questions.)

Besides, you challenged my claim that the majority of Australians support same-sex marriage. I provided the evidence. Moving the goalposts isn't a good look.

Marriage is a legal contract. It contains no requirements regarding having – or trying to have – children. I have two close friends who have been married for around 20 years. They have known since well before they got married that she is infertile. They now have two adopted children. By your criteria, they ought not be allowed to have married, because when they did so, they did not intend to embark on 'reproduction initiated via sexual intercourse'. Is that really what you want? Are you going to agitate for amendments to the Marriage Act?

Religious sanction of marriage is largely irrelevant in modern Australian society and lends no support to your argument. The ratio of civil to religious weddings in NSW, for example is around 2:1. What occurred in the past is irrelevant. We're talking about now.

And don't be concerned about the "ungainly adjectival construct 'same-sex'". In jurisdictions where gay marriage exists, people don't bother with the prefix. They just call it "marriage"--because that's what it is.

Sun at 6:15pm

Ian Shanahan @Mark. The various sacred texts I know all speak unambiguously *against* same-sex sex-acts. I'm curious to know which religion(s) you think have "no prohibition against homosexuality". Yes, the marriage/religion nexus may be an archaism – but it lasted for millennia, hence is not to be too easily discarded.

@Margaret. One survey of 1,100 people out of a population of 21,000,000+ can hardly be regarded as conclusive. Anyway, the survey itself was crude in that it begged the question by using the word "marriage" in the first place without qualification (thereby denying a nuanced answer for those who might object on the grounds of terminology). Your "evidence" is shaky indeed; and the goalposts look set to fall over all on their own without me pushing them... Perhaps it's time for a referendum to test your hypothesis.

Your 3rd paragraph puts words in my mouth, via a *non sequitur*. Not on! I made no pronouncements whatsoever about who "ought not be allowed to have married", only on terminology. I thought you said you valued logic... I stated clearly what I wanted: a new term for a relatively new relational ceremony. On what grounds do you object to that?

Religious sanction etc. is only irrelevant to those for whom it is irrelevant. And the events of the last decade show that religion is very far from dead. The past is *never* irrelevant, as it is always with us.

Sorry to disagree with you, but, for all the reasons I give, same-sex union is *not* marriage (at least in my book – and never will be). Let's agree to disagree.

However, *this* question remains unanswered: what objection can there be to a neologism for a formal same-sex union?

Sun at 6:58pm

Mark Isaacs @ Ian. There is no specific prohibition against homosexuality in Buddhism. The subject is controversial in Hinduism, but those advocating against homosexuality can find no specific support in their scriptures. That's two of the world's largest faiths right there.

For the record I generally fence-sit in arguments between progressives and traditionalists. This is because in my musical life I have had nasty experiences with both types (pernicious progressivism in the form of militant High Modernists, and repressive conservatives who can't get beyond the first Viennese school and abhor jazz as a mongrel form etc.).

It is clear that there are things worth conserving and it is clear that there must be progress. I understand and respect those who wish to campaign to change the law, I understand those who wish to preserve it. I am accustomed to living in a pluralist democracy

I respect the individual arguments of both progressives and conservatives as long as they are without fallacy, are consistent, and avoid the *ad hominem*. I believe your citing of "sacred texts" is problematic.

I don't campaign for either side in the same-sex marriage debate. I might counter-argue where in my view either side indulges in sophistry, specious reasoning etc. As is always the case, this can give the temporary illusion of being for one side or the other.

I also respect democracy and the judiciary and generally accept whatever the law is or whatever it becomes. So far.

I understand that not all gay people are united on this point. Some indeed agree that marriage is a heterosexual institution which they believe should not be associated with homosexual unions, wishing to

define their unions in their own way as you propose and in a sense relishing the “outsider” tradition of their sexuality.
Sun at 7:42pm

Margaret Morgan Ian, I can see you’ve never studied statistics (I have). Population size is not relevant to sample size. It doesn’t matter if you’ve surveyed 1,100 people out of a population of 21,000 or 21,000,000,000, providing the sample is representative, random and independent (which it is, according to the weighting disclosed). For binary categorical analysis such as this, pollsters typically use at least 500 in the sample.

Your suggestion that the survey data was skewed by the question would in fact support my argument rather than yours, since those disagreeing with the use of the term, “marriage” would be more likely to reject the proposition than agree with it.

My apologies for misstating your position. Let me ask this: should people in my friends’ position, rather than marrying, enter into the same sort of agreement you would prefer for gays? Or ought they be allowed to marry like my husband and I have, given that we’ve procreated naturally?

Yes, religion is irrelevant for those of us who don’t subscribe to it. It has nothing to do with the legal concept of marriage, because we live in a secular society. In no legislation or common law in Australia will you find any requirement of satisfying religious doctrine for a marriage to be properly constituted. It has nothing to do with the issue at hand.

Why create an entirely new legal apparatus for gay people’s relationships? Because it continues to alienate a significant proportion of the community. It demeans them and marks them out as somehow not good enough for “proper” marriage. Why not just let them marry? Just a tiny amendment to the various States’ legislation and it’s done. I can’t understand that anyone would object to basic egalitarianism on the grounds of linguistic squeamishness.
Sun at 7:49pm

Mark Isaacs @Margaret. I’ve already anticipated a counter argument to your point about stigmatisation and marginalisation. One must be careful not to *impose* this interpretation. While marginalisation is by and large undesirable, it seems there is a tradition in gay culture that takes the opposite take, as I say a proud “outsider” tradition. This must be acknowledged when an argument like yours is put, though it may not prove to be the dominant view in the gay community or the community at large. But one must guard against all vestiges of paternalism or projection.
Sun at 8:00pm

Margaret Morgan Mark, sure. In response to that I say that I know plenty of straight people in *de facto* married relationships who absolutely refuse to marry as a matter of principle. And yes, there are many in the gay community who feel the same way. I think my straight friends, however, would nevertheless object if they were to be told that they *couldn’t* marry. Anyway, I’m not imposing this interpretation: it’s one I’ve heard from many gays and lesbians of my acquaintance. I have two cousins, both in long-term, domestic relationships (over thirty years, in each case – they put the rest of the family to shame!) and they’d marry in an eye-blink and very much resent that they’re not allowed to. They see it as nothing but pure bigotry.

Still, I do appreciate your concern about paternalism – it is something that I am conscious of trying to avoid.
Sun at 8:15pm

Mark Isaacs Absolutely Margaret, in mentioning the positive take on “outsider” I acknowledged that this may not be the dominant view amongst gays, otherwise I’d be guilty of the reverse paternalism! In the end it’s going to be weight of numbers in the community at large I’d say. And, regarding bigotry – homophobia and

bigotry exist and therefore must be some sort of factor contributing in whatever measure to any maintenance of the *status quo* alongside more savoury and principled conservatism, but as we have already agreed one cannot presume it is the case in individuals merely on the basis of the position they take on the issue.
Sun at 8:43pm

Margaret Morgan Bravo, Mark!
Sun at 9:54pm

Ian Shanahan @Mark. The Buddhist situation is by no means so clear-cut. I have heard the Dalai Lama himself speak out against homosexuality. (Indeed, a gay composer friend of mine turned against Buddhism because of it...) [Off topic, as probably the most "militant High Modernist" composer in the country, I have *always* loved jazz – including what I have heard of your music; jazz is present deep-down in the sound-world of my own music. I'm truly sorry that someone has given you grief.] Back to topic, why is the citing of sacred texts *per se* problematic? (I only mentioned them in passing, historiographically; it's not central to mylinguistic argument anyway...)

@Margaret. You're right about me not formally studying statistics. However, I did 3 years of honours-level pure maths at the University of Sydney and have a passing acquaintance with various statistical concepts. In the medical profession, a sample of 1,100 would be regarded as statistically insignificant, so the medicos tell me: at least 10 times that number is needed, they say. So I'm not convinced that that survey from **The Age** is truly representative. And because it failed to ask nuanced questions about *definitions*, we simply cannot draw any conclusions about that aspect of the topic. I don't agree with you that this lack supports your case, because one who quibbles over the terminology – as I do – might well be prepared to overlook the use of the word "marriage" and vote 'yes' for the principle of the thing.

To answer your specific question (about your friends): you can deduce from my initial post that I regard marriage *by definition* as a union between people of opposite sexes. That includes your friends. I *only* raised those other issues – marriage as a context for natural procreation; its religious heritage – to demonstrate marriage's fundamental distinction to same-sex (civil) unions. So I ask yet again: What's wrong with bypassing this eristic bone-of-contention completely by creating a neologism?
Sun at 10:50pm

[Neil deleted his post. Therefore unable to quote it.]

Ian Shanahan @Neil. Your first paragraph is (a) incoherent, (b) false (i.e. the last sentence), and (c) irrelevant. The Dalai Lama said what he said as *the* representative of Tibetan Buddhism – it's highest authority. No game-playing... To what extent he represents the whole Buddhist *sangha*, I do not know. To answer your questions:

- 1) I didn't.
- 2) Nothing – except that humans are higher than animals, since we are able to reflect upon the whole cosmos (NB: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin).
- 3) and 4) Take your time.
- 5) Both Male and Female have spirit ("*pneuma*"); your point being...?
- 6) I've done both, but mostly the latter.
- 7) True, but so what...

Cheers.
Yesterday at 3:11am

Margaret Morgan *sigh*

Ian, I think I'm going to give up on you. I'm afraid that your pomposity combined with your ignorance is too wearing. Go talk to a statistician and learn something, okay?
Yesterday at 9:15am

Ian Shanahan And so the claws come out... You can't agree to disagree, or see past your own cyclopean *Weltanschauung*. I repeat: that survey is flawed: in addition, there was not even a 'no opinion' option. (Samuel Clement: "Lies, damn lies, and statistics".) And you repeatedly failed to even address, let alone answer, my main question: what's wrong with a neologism for a same-sex union? If you want pomposity, look in the mirror. Who are you? The Tone Fuhrer? And as for the ignorance jibe: in an overall knowledge contest, I would absolutely *annihilate* you. So piss off. Over and out.

Dr Ian Shanahan.
Yesterday at 9:50am

Margaret Morgan Ian, you know nothing about me. I am not going to play competing degrees with you.
Yesterday at 9:56am

Ian Shanahan A non-response... A squib... I know enough about you now to know that I don't want to know you. Bye Bye.

PS: As for competing degrees etc. you'd probably lose anyway. e.g. Do you have a University Medal from the country's oldest (and best) university? No?
Yesterday at 10:04am

Margaret Morgan Ian, let it go. You are demeaning yourself. At least my degrees are relevant to the subject at hand (law, literature and science). That's why I understand stats, logic and language use. Yesterday at 10:07am

Ian Shanahan Actually, I topped logic in my university maths class in two years: Boolean logic and Godelian (20th-century) logic. Law is but a game that *twists* logic. (Literature? So what... I read voraciously.) Please stop wasting my time.
Yesterday at 10:30am

Ian Shanahan One more thing: If you are such an 'expert' in literature, why do you continually evade my question about creating a neologism for formal same-sex unions? And if you claim expertise in law, perhaps you'd care to explain why such a thing is even legally *necessary*?
Yesterday at 10:41am

Margaret Morgan I thought you wanted to stop talking with me, Ian? Let it go.
Yesterday at 11:11am

Ian Shanahan Typical legatrix ... gotta have the last word...
Yesterday at 12:03pm

Margaret Morgan Well, you did ask me another question. "One more thing." But now it's goodbye.
Yesterday at 12:05pm

Ian Shanahan Thank God for small mercies...
Yesterday at 12:07pm

Michael Noone Hi Margaret: we've never met, but as a lurker (and a friend of Simon's), I just wanted to say how much I appreciate the care and patience with which you put together a carefully reasoned argument. This medium is not ideal for subtlety and reason. And that makes it all the more golden when it appears!
Yesterday at 2:32pm

Margaret Morgan Thank you, Michael. I really do appreciate that.
Yesterday at 2:57pm

Ian Shanahan Hi Michael: "carefully reasoned argument"? Only within a narrowly circumscribed boundary: My perfectly reasonable neologism proposition was repeatedly ignored; and calling marriage a "legal contract" is akin to John Howard referring to Australia as an "economy" (ignoring the fact that Australia embraces a *society*)... My questioning of a survey's sample-size and un-nuanced questioning was simplistically dismissed as "ignorance". (Ha!) Plus there's the failure to recognise that in language, meanings are *never* superseded, only buried – like palaeontological strata, accessible by excavation.

But you wouldn't have a vested interest issue in the whole subject now, would you?
Yesterday at 8:44pm

Simon Tedeschi Ian. Just curious. Why would Michael's interest in this issue be a vested one?
Yesterday at 9:01pm

Margaret Morgan Perhaps he's projecting, Simon.
Yesterday at 10:22pm

Ian Shanahan Because it's a gay political issue – almost a non-entity throughout heterosexual society. And, knowing Michael personally, I don't think it's a secret that he's gay...

For the record, my own position on legalized same-sex unions is pretty neutral – due to my lack of knowledge (let alone interest) concerning its legal implications. I *suspect* that, in Australia, it is (a) unnecessary practically – nobody is preventing some sort of ceremony celebrating such a relationship, should one be desired – and legally, (b) will only make more money for already overpaid lawyers (such as Margaret's ex-colleagues?), and (c) will further burden the already overburdened court system in the event of 'disunion'. My objection thus far has been *entirely* about the needless arrogation of the word 'marriage' in labelling such a union: a linguistic, semiotic quibble.

I also suspect that the *real* agenda behind the whole issue concerns a vicarious grasping after normality. If so, then this is a futile political exercise – since homosexuality is, on purely statistical or sociological grounds, an abnormality. (Proof: non-zero population growth worldwide.) Anyway, haven't our politicians nowadays got many more pressing issues to address – like the ramifications of climate-change, growing numbers of refugees, and securing alternative energy-sources (all of these being interrelated ecologically)? What next – a push for legalizing 'inter-species 'marriage'?! (On logical grounds, *that* would become a dystopian possibility...) In terms of mundane reality, this issue is, surely, of very low priority – indeed rather selfish and bourgeois, particularly to a starving or oppressed African child (say).

Returning to Michael's post, I think he's confusing reason with politics. Margaret – who by her own admission is no sociologist – just *had* to initiate an *ad hominem* attack: 'reason' went out the window; so much for "care", "patience" and "subtlety"...

Yesterday at 11:20pm

Margaret Morgan I might not be a sociologist, Ian, but I am a biologist. And I utterly take issue with your assertion that homosexuality is an abnormality. It is entirely normal, likely to be evolutionarily adaptive, and occurs in dozens of different phyla.

Yesterday at 11:20pm

Simon Tedeschi Ian, if one accepts your assertion that Michael's stance on gay marriage is vested, can we also assume that your Catholicism renders your views similarly vested? They're a pretty big interest group. And the last time I checked, that great institution was also making lots of money for overpaid lawyers. And the cases almost involved REAL abnormalities.

Yesterday at 11:29pm

Ian Shanahan @Margaret. You can take issue as much as you like; you'd still be wrong... I said "on purely statistical or sociological grounds". I am well aware of homosexuality's various biological manifestations – not to mention parthenogenesis – where still it remains, statistically, an abnormality. (I *never* declared that homosexuality is 'unnatural'.) Anyway, this is about formalized *human* relationships; so your point is irrelevant. Please henceforth read my posts more carefully and apply your much-lauded logic rather than (politically-driven?) emotionalism.

Yesterday at 11:29pm

Ian Shanahan @Simon. I'm not a Roman Catholic. And yet again, my sole concern is in *linguistic precision*. Otherwise, I don't have any vested interest whatsoever in the matter. Yawn...

Yesterday at 11:38pm

Margaret Morgan Okay, if you mean "abnormal" in the sense of "in the minority", fine. That's "abnormal" like, say, a composer is "abnormal" or a biologist is "abnormal" or being left-handed is "abnormal". I hardly consider that status grounds for political irrelevance.

But I do think Simon's onto something here. Is Leviticus your favourite chapter [*sic!*] of the Bible, perchance? Your scatter-gun objections to same-sex marriage do give one cause to wonder. It offends your linguistic sensibilities. It causes you to indulge in macabre statistical contortions ("Proof: non-zero population growth worldwide." Gads. Do you really want to argue that?) Your *faux* naivety concerning the enormous difference in civil rights between the married and the non-married. Your suggestion that amending one clause in state Marriage Acts would entail more money for "already overpaid lawyers" ["such as Margaret's ex-colleagues" – gosh, you were just aching to be allowed some juicy *ad hominem*s yourself, weren't you? Actually, most of my colleagues were in poverty law/legal aid/community legal centres] when in reality, creating an entirely new legal form of domestic relationship, which you advocate, would do precisely that. Your silly games trying to play academic two-up. What is at the root of it, Ian?

You suggest that "it's a gay political issue – almost a non-entity throughout heterosexual society". I dispute that. It means a lot to most of us on the progressive side of politics. It's obviously not a "non-entity" to you, either, or you wouldn't have expended so much time on this thread. Me? I'm a straight woman, married and have "naturally reproduced" (Huzzah! My marriage is REAL!) Like many others, I care because I care about human rights. I care because it affects those close to me, both family and friends. I care because, unlike you, I don't see being gay as "abnormal". And, I suspect, because unlike you, I'm not blinkered by religious bigotry.

Today at 12:04am

Ian Shanahan Political irrelevance in the face of much bigger, and vastly more complex, urgent global problems...

Regarding Simon's question: No. Simon's logic is flawed here. Homosexuals presumably have something to gain – exactly what, I do not know – by legalizing same-sex unions (hence a potential vested interest); I, on the other hand, have *nothing* to gain by it (hence *no* vested interest).

Margaret, you are parading your literary ignorance by asserting that Leviticus is a “chapter” of the Bible; actually, it's the third *book*. (Assuming that your question isn't merely rhetorical, by the way, my favourite books from the Bible are Ecclesiastes, Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, the Gospel and First Epistle of John, and the Book of Revelation.)

I will ignore the ridiculous screeching hysteria of the remainder of your second paragraph – which is utter rubbish, particularly given that I professed a neutral stance towards the legalization of same-sex unions – except to say that any assertion of homosexuality as a *norm* among humans is patently risible; and that merely creating a neologism for legalized same-sex union ought to have no bearing whatever upon legal arguments or entitlements. (An afterthought: Wouldn't it be easier and better to amend the relevant legislation concerning *de facto* relationships, to incorporate same-sex unions there instead? This would circumvent the “marriage” quandary altogether.) Anyway, the crucial issue for me is semantic...

Your last paragraph (invoking “human rights”): please spell out precisely how gay/lesbian rights would be somehow transgressed by my insistence that same-sex unions, even were they to be legalized in Australia, are not “marriages” and should not be labelled as such. What's wrong with the proposed neologism approach – I ask this for about the sixth time – or the tweaking of laws pertaining to *de facto* unions? Why the absolute *insistence* upon the term “marriage”? What has anybody got to lose by conceding the semantic point, given that other solutions exist (for those who want them).

Yet again, Margaret, you twist my words – now putting an unintended pejorative overtone upon my use of the word “abnormal” (which I *twice* declared to be deployed in its statistico-sociological sense). Yet again, you introduce a red-herring – religion: Christianity? – about which you also display further ignorance, in that true Christianity (as with various other religions) involves *opposing* bigotry, at least in principle. e.g. “Love your neighbour as yourself”. So please drop the religious spin, and remove your own blinkers of (antireligious) political correctness. Who's *really* playing games here?

En passant, I have a great many (predominantly left-wing) friends – straight and gay – who, to the best of my knowledge, have NEVER raised the central topic of this thread, so that, for them, it *is* indeed a political fizzer; and the gays among them must be laughing uproariously at your pathetic insinuation that I am somehow ‘homophobic’. So stop your sneerin’ and smearin’.

One last thing: I am seriously involved with voluntary work for **TEAR Australia**, an organization which provides various kinds of practical aid to several third-world countries. I am actually getting off my arse and helping to SOLVE REAL PROBLEMS in the world. If you want to strut your self-described “progressive” lefty credentials, then I ask: what the hell are YOU doing to help those in *real* need (beyond a bunch of whinging self-centred middle-class bourgeois well-fed gays and lesbians)?

Today at 3:52am

Michael Noone Hi folks. I'm a little taken aback by the tone of the discourse here; indeed concern about the tone and a respect for carefully reasoned argument was the reason for, and subject of, the only comment I made. I guess as an academic and as a teacher I have a ‘vested interest’ in respectful discourse and the strength or otherwise of the argument. But would that ‘vested interest’ somehow disqualify me from commenting?

11 hours ago

Ian Shanahan Hi Michael:

1. Tone of discourse here is what it is, and of minor import compared with reasoning. This ain't the groves of academe (where indeed I've encountered worse).
2. I too always seek to uphold careful reasoning in my argument – albeit not always dispassionately. If in your opinion I have failed, then please back that up with evidence.
3. Argument and opinion are distinct creatures. The value of the latter depends upon the former together with its degree of informedness.
4. Politics is another thing entirely; it's goal is 'power' rather than 'truth'.
5. Despite attempts by some so-called "progressives" to suppress it, freedom of speech is thankfully still allowed in the West, so go ahead and comment away til your heart's content...

I would only add that, as a former academic and teacher myself, humanities faculties certainly had little patience for "carefully reasoned argument" if that argument strayed from whatever party-line held sway therein – in which case 'tone' and 'respect' flew out the window. In case of an impasse, why cannot some people just agree to disagree?

9 hours ago

Margaret Morgan Yes, Michael, you're right. The suggestion that you were unable to approach this issue objectively because you're gay did, I confess, infuriate me. This weakness in you is, apparently, to be contrasted with the vast brain and infinite academic qualifications of Ian, who it seems is far beyond the laughable human foible of bias.

Sadly, most people of his ilk end up this way in debate. They demand evidence for things that are readily accessible if only they were motivated to educate themselves – which they're not, because bigotry is their motivation. They focus on minutiae while stubbornly pretending not to see the bleeding obvious. The writing should have been on the wall many posts ago, when he told me to "piss off".

I am not wasting any more time with this goose. It's like debating a creationist.

5 hours ago

Ian Shanahan Margaret, I never suggested that Michael was "unable to approach this issue objectively because [he is] gay". Rather, I stated that he has a vested interest in it – an entirely different kettle of fish. Yet again, your logic is slipping, madam. Nor did I impute any "weakness" in Michael. Nor am I biased: did I not repeatedly say that my position on this issue is neutral, apart from its semantic dimension?

Margaret's –

- (a) introduction of an *ad hominem* attack,
- (b) pathetic sarcasm and name-calling,
- (c) repeated illogic, including attempts to contort my argument and imply hidden agendas (typical bloody pettifogger...),
- (d) failure to address reasonable questions,
- (e) claims that I am uneducated and wilfully ignorant (in the face of contrary evidence within this thread),
- (f) *faux* umbrage at my working-class idiolect, after being invited to "piss off" (what a delicate creature she must be),
- (g) refusal to "see the bleeding obvious" (e.g. that homosexuality among the human population – practised by much less than 50% of it – is, therefore, an abnormality; that on the human-rights scale, legalizing same-sex unions pales into insignificance compared with basic things like homelessness in this country, and is arguably not even necessary let alone legally advantageous – demonstrate that she is not worthy of debate.

I am not wasting any more time with this chick (a one-eyed thought-fascist who cannot agree to disagree, and clearly demands 100% conformity to her particular *Weltanschauung*; shades of Orwell's **1984**). It's like debating a militant atheist.

about an hour ago

Margaret Morgan I'd just like to thank all those who have messaged me during the course of this thread, and am delighted to have made some new Facebook friends. And now, I hope, the thread is closed.
about an hour ago

Ian Shanahan ... as if mutual back-slapping lends any further validity whatsoever to your position. Ha!

But thanks anyway for your footnote, since I too have acquired a few more Facebook "friends" on account of this tedious thread – a fine compensation.
about an hour ago

Write a comment...